GRASS

V.N.

There are some things in life that are easily overlooked precisely because they are so small, so quiet, and so seldom mentioned.

Yet without them, the world around us would suddenly feel strangely empty.

Grass is one of those things.

I have a little patch of grass in front of my house.

Calling it a “lawn” may sound rather grand, because, truthfully, there is nothing very grand about it. It is simply a small piece of ground between the walkway, the fence, and a few shrubs. The grass grows naturally

there—some blades thick, some thin, some bright green, some turning yellow.

Some days it looks beautiful.

Other days it does not look particularly beautiful at all.

And yet, strangely enough, I look at it every day.

Perhaps grass is the only plant that can survive quite well without much human attention.

In Vietnamese, the word for grass—*cỏ*—is very short. "Rose" sounds elegant. "Apricot tree," "orchid," and "peach blossom" all carry a certain dignity. But *cỏ*?

Just one small syllable.

It sounds humble, close to the earth.

Scientifically, grass belongs to the family *Poaceae*, one of the largest and most important plant families on Earth. It includes rice, corn, sugarcane, bamboo, reeds, millet, and countless other plants that most of us never bother to name.

It is rather amusing when you think about it: a vast family of plants that helps feed humanity is collectively represented by such a modest word—grass.

Rice gives us food.

Wheat gives us bread.

Corn gives us corn.

Sugarcane gives us sugar.

Bamboo gives us more useful things than we can count.

Other grasses feed cattle, horses, goats, and sheep.

And the little blades growing in front of my house?

They feed nobody.

They simply... grow there.

Perhaps that is exactly what makes them worth thinking about.

They simply *are*.

In the morning, I often step outside and look at the little patch of grass. If it has rained, the grass is greener than usual. Tiny drops of water cling to the tips of the blades and sparkle in the sunlight.

Some droplets are so small that I have to bend down to see them.

And whenever I do, I suddenly feel as though I am looking into another world.

There are no business meetings there.

No breaking news.

No telephones.

No long arguments.

There is only a small community of grass blades leaning gently against one another and living their quiet lives.

Grass does not possess the obvious beauty of flowers.

Flowers must be noticed.

Grass does not.

Flowers bloom in order to be admired.

Grass grows simply because that is what grass does.

Flowers have seasons.

Grass often seems not to need one.

Cut it, and it grows again.

Crush it, and it rises.

Let the sun burn it, and it turns yellow—but give it water, and it becomes green again.

Sometimes you think it has died.

Then, a few weeks later, you look down and discover that it has returned from somewhere beneath the soil.

Grass is remarkably persistent.

And its persistence has a kind of quiet dignity.

Human beings tend to admire things that stand out.

A tree should be tall.

A flower should be beautiful.

A garden should be carefully trimmed and perfectly arranged.

But if grass grows where we do not want it, we call it a weed.

That word—*weed*—has always struck me as somewhat unfair.

Why should it be called a weed?

The grass has done nothing wrong.

It simply grew where it was able to grow.

When people plant grass in a yard, they call it a lawn.

When the same grass grows beside the yard, they call it a weed.

The plant is the same.

The only difference is whether human beings want it there.

When you think about it, grass may be one of the living things most unfairly judged by humanity.

I have seen people care for their lawns with extraordinary devotion.

They mow them evenly.

Water them on schedule.

Add fertilizer.

Kill the weeds.

Repair every damaged spot.

The result is a perfectly green lawn, smooth and beautiful, almost like a carpet.

But the little patch of grass in front of my house is not like that.

It lives according to its own rules.

Some days it grows a little taller.

I look at it and think, “It’s time to mow the lawn.”

Then something distracts me.

I forget.

And the grass keeps growing.

Sometimes I remember the poet Thế Lữ and his dislike of landscapes that are too carefully arranged—too tidy, too artificial, too determined to imitate nature while controlling every inch of it.

And so the grass continues to grow.

When I finally notice it again, it is a little taller still.

Then someone complains:

“Your grass is getting as tall as the jungle!”

So I take out the lawn mower, and for a moment I feel almost as though I am about to do something nature would not approve of.

Then the mower begins.

Rrrrr...

Rrrrr...

Rrrrr...

One by one, the blades of grass fall.

The yard immediately looks neat.

And at exactly the same moment, it becomes...

a little sadder.

I do not know why.

Perhaps when the grass grows tall, the yard looks alive.

When it is cut short, it resembles a room that has just been cleaned thoroughly—spotless, orderly, and somehow missing a little of its humanity.

Grass has a very simple philosophy:

Keep growing.

It does not need to know whether someone cut it yesterday.

It does not need to know whether someone will step on it tomorrow.

It does not need to know whether anyone thinks it is beautiful.

It simply grows.

Sometimes I think that if human beings could live a little more like grass, life might be less complicated.

We spend so much of our time trying to prove who we are.

We want recognition.

We want people to remember us.

We want a name.

We want a reputation.

We want to leave something behind.

Grass does not.

Nobody knows the name of each little clump of grass in front of my house.

I certainly do not.

It has no biography.

No job title.

No degrees.

No business cards.

Nobody photographs it and posts the picture on Facebook.

And yet...

it remains green.

One morning, I stood by the window and looked at the little lawn.

A sparrow hopped down into the grass and tilted its head as it searched for something to eat.

A butterfly drifted past.

The wind blew softly, and the entire patch of grass moved together.

Suddenly I realized:

Grass is not alone.

It is part of a whole world.

That tiny patch of ground in front of my house may appear to contain nothing at all. But in truth, countless things are happening there.

Ants move beneath the soil.

Spiders weave their webs.

Birds search for food.

Butterflies pass through.

Tiny seeds drift down on the wind.

Rain comes.

Sunshine comes.

Night falls.

Dew gathers.

All of it takes place on a small piece of ground that people may walk past without ever thinking to look down.

Grass makes me think about the small things in life.

There are people who resemble grass.

They are not famous.

Their names are not often mentioned.

There are no statues of them.

No streets bear their names.

They simply live quietly.

They do their work.

They raise their families.

They help other people.

And one day, quietly, they leave.

But without them, this world would be far emptier.

Just as the earth would be different without grass.

Perhaps nature does not divide the world into “important” and “unimportant” things the way human beings do.

A beautiful flower and a tiny blade of grass both have their places.

Only human beings seem determined to rank everything.

Grass never competes with flowers.

The flower blooms on the branch.

The grass grows close to the ground.

One reaches toward the sky.

The other remains near the earth.

And yet together, they make a garden a garden.

Sometimes I look at my little patch of grass and think of it as a green page.

Every day, nature writes a very short story upon it.

Rain writes one line.

Sunshine writes another.

The wind adds a sentence.

A passerby leaves a footprint.

A dog runs across and leaves several crooked marks.

Then night comes, and everything becomes quiet again.

The next morning, the grass continues to grow.

Perhaps that is what I like most about grass.

It makes no promises.

It does not tell us that tomorrow will be better.

It simply does one thing faithfully:

It lives.

And perhaps that, in itself, is a philosophy large enough for any of us.

Since I began paying attention to the little patch of grass in front of my house, I have learned to love grass more.

Before, I saw it merely as something that needed mowing.

Now, before I mow it, I sometimes stand and look at it for a while.

The little blades tremble in the wind.

Some stand straight.

Some bend.

Some are green.

Some have turned yellow.

Some have been crushed beneath someone's feet, yet are still trying to lift themselves again.

And I think:

Human life is much the same.

No one remains green forever.

There are seasons when we flourish.

There are seasons when we turn yellow.

There are times when we think we have fallen for good.

And yet sometimes all it takes is a little rain, a little sunshine, or a gentle hand reaching toward us...

and we begin to grow again.

Grass has taught me something very simple:

Do not be too quick to believe that something is dead simply because it is no longer green today.

Perhaps it is only waiting for rain.

And so I have learned to love grass.

To love the small things I used to walk past without noticing.

To love those “weeds” that arrive uninvited and simply make themselves at home.

To love the little patch of grass in front of my house—a place where nothing extraordinary seems to happen, and yet which has quietly accompanied me through so many ordinary mornings.

Some things in life reveal their beauty only when we take the time to look at them carefully.

Grass is one of those things.

It grows so low that few people bother to look down.

It is so small that few people bother to bend over.

But if we are willing to bend down just a little, we may discover an entire living world.

And perhaps, somewhere in that small green world, the grass is smiling at us and saying:

“You people go ahead and stay busy.

Go ahead and compete with one another.

Go ahead and worry about tomorrow.

As for me?

I am only grass.

I will just keep growing.”

That is all.

And somehow, it is enough.

for those who love grass

一地青青草
A field of tender green grass,

春風自在生
Growing freely in the spring breeze.

不爭花色艷
It does not compete with flowers in brilliance,

惟與雨相親
It simply welcomes the gentle rain.

野火燒難盡
Wildfires may burn it, but cannot destroy it completely,

春風吹復新
And the spring wind brings it green again.

莫嗤身卑下
Do not laugh at its humble place,

長存天地春
For it keeps the spring alive between heaven and earth.

A Poetic Rendering

A field of grass, forever green,
Spring winds let it grow serene.
It does not vie with flowers bright,
But welcomes rain with pure delight.

Though prairie fires may scorch the ground,
New green will rise when spring comes round.
Despise not things that grow so low—
They keep the earth in springtime glow.

A LITTLE PATCH OF GRASS

Green grass upon my little yard,
The morning breeze blows soft and mild.
No fragrance, no bright colors proud,
Yet year by year it stays awhile.

The rain comes down—it sprouts anew.
The sun beats hard—it quietly bears.
Though countless feet may tread upon it,
Tomorrow finds new blades still there.

It does not seek the lofty places,
But stays close to the native earth.
While flowers blaze with brilliant beauty,
The grass keeps coming, back and forth.

And someday, when my hair is silver,
I'll look upon that patch of green
And find my heart becoming lighter
Than it has ever, ever been.

For life has wandered, drifted, struggled—
Through countless seasons, near and far.
Let me be like a blade of grass:

Quiet...

Humble...

And still here.

Anaheim, August 2026